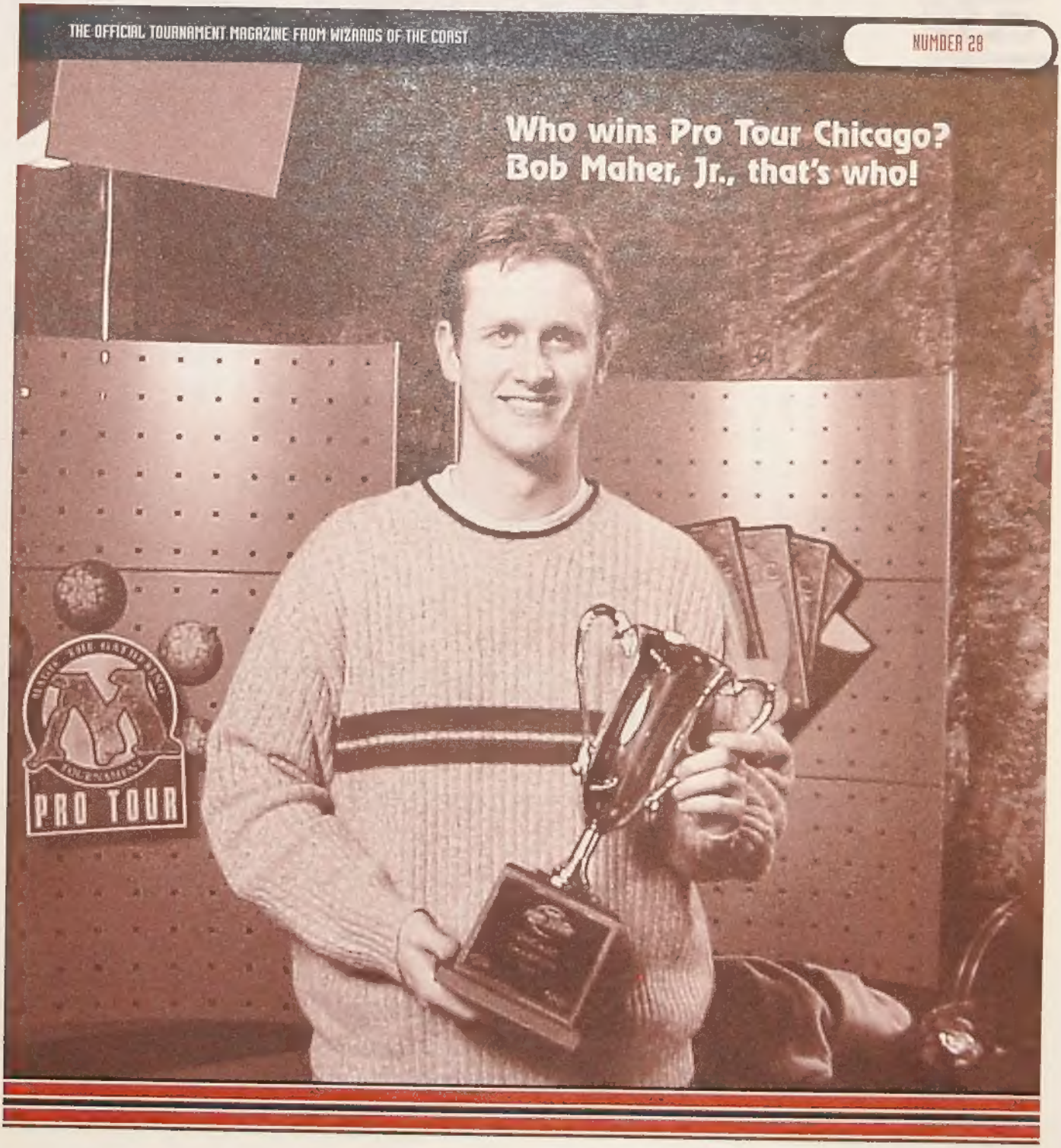
THE SIDEBOARD

January 2000

THE OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT MAGAZINE FROM WIZARDS OF THE COAST

NUMBER 28



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THE SIDEBOARD

Volume 5, Issue 1, January 2000

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Something clever about the winner

Chicago Final Standings

1	Maher Jr., Bob
2	Davis, Brian
3	Luhrs, Christian
4	Levy, Raphael
5	Comer, Alan
6	Baberowski, Dirk
7	Dobson, Tony
8	Fuentes, Hector
9	Ormerod, John
10	Wiegersma, Jelger
11	Chapin, Patrick
12	Ho, Lan
13	Wollpert, Worth
14	Finkel, Jon
15	Valkyser, Stephan
16	Mori, Masaya
17	White, Mark
18	Gary, Justin
19	Fuller, Ryan
20	Llopis, Paco
21	Gallitz, Donald
22	Radonjic, Pete
23	Burgner, Kurt
24	Marsh, Warren
25	Slemr, Jakub
26	Snepvangers, Abraham
27	Maier, Gero
28	Rissanen, Toni
29	Guevin, Peter
30	Cunningham, Jeff
31	Lefranc, Florent
32	Vienneau, Matthew
33	Menard, Antoine
34	OMS, Daniel
35	Herin, Chip
36	Leventhal, Dennis
37	Quelle, Blake
38	Parke, Jamie
39	Krakower, Gary
40	Hron, Mike
41	Girodroux, Pierre
42	Kastle, Darwin
43	Marks, John
44	Cook, Cy
45	Benezech, Lionel
46	Jensen, Cory
47	Van Cleave, Trey
48	Ligtvoet, Mark
49	Elarar, Jay
50	McConnell, Alex
51	Budde, Kai
52	Johnson, Vincent
53	Bernat, Michael
54	MacDonald, Andrew
55	Krzywicki, Mike
56	Jacobson, Ben
57	Keady, Sean
58	Urban, Matt
59	Herms Pont, Roc
60	Lanzillotta, Jason
61	Nishiwaki, Masahiro
62	Yamada, Tsutomu
63	Stark, Ben
64	Williams, David

Pro Tour–Chicago Post-Event Coverage

In one of the most dramatic championship matches in the history of the Pro Tour, hometown favorite Bob Maher, Jr. won Pro Tour–Chicago, held December 3–5, 1999. After wading his way through the most diverse collection of decks ever assembled at one tournament, Maher used his three-color Oath of Druids deck to defeat Brian Davis and his mono-black Necrodeck, three games to two.

Maher won the first game despite the fact that Davis Unmasked him on the first turn and "Ritualed" out a Necropotence. Maher kept Brainstorming his way into permission spells to stay alive long enough to draw and play an Ivory Mask. Davis followed with a Nevinyrral's Disk, but Maher then Tutored for a Null Rod before the Disk could untap. Davis may have conceded this game a little early, but all he had left in his library to win were lonely Skittering Skirges.

In Game 2 Davis went for the kill by playing a Drain Life for 4 when he had 10 lands in play. If he had tapped three more lands, Davis would indeed have won Game 2, but Maher activated a Treetop Village and then played Swords to Plowshares on it so he would gain 3 life and stay alive. Davis was so disheartened by his mistake (and perhaps by the crowd screaming "Oh, no!") that he conceded the game, forgetting that he still gained 4 life and thus he wasn't actually going to be knocked out for one more turn. It turned out that the top card of his library was another Drain Life, and Maher was helpless to stop that one from destroying him.

Fifteen-year old Davis is the first player from Memphis to crack the Top 200 at a Pro Tour, and he shattered that mark. Playing in his first Pro Tour, with a Necrodeck, there was a certain mystique surrounding Davis. However, after a weekend of mostly flawless play (including a brilliant game in the quarterfinals where he locked Raphael Levy with Levy's own Winter Orb), Davis made some mistakes in the finals. He seemed a little rattled by either the high stakes or by the loud, boisterous crowd that was obviously cheering for Chicago-native Bob Maher. Even though he lost his last match, Davis still walked away with $15,000 and an invitation to each of the next six Pro Tour stops.

In Game 3, Davis got his nerves in check, tapped all his mana for the final Drain Life, and finally won a game. In Game 4, the power of Necropotence allowed Davis to even the match at two games apiece, thus setting up a Game 5 for $10,000 and the title of "Pro Tour–Chicago Champion." Davis once again had an amazing draw—he used Unmask to take Force of Will out of Maher's hand and then used Dark Ritual to play a first-turn Necropotence. Maher had only two lands in his draw and Davis destroyed them both with Wastelands. The crucial turn came when Davis played a Duress and had to choose between Force of Will and three Counterspells. Since Maher had no other blue cards in his hand, Davis chose to take a Counterspell. However, Maher later drew a Brainstorm and used it to play Force of Will without using up any of the other two Counterspells. And when Maher drew two more lands before Davis could defeat him, those Counterspells really hurt Davis. Since he sank a Dark Ritual into a Drain Life that got Counterspelled, Davis was forced to use Demonic Consultation to go get a sixth Swamp before he could play Corrupt. But when Maher countered that too, Davis found himself stuck on 1 life with Necropotence in play and no threats in his hand. He then conceded the game and the title to Bob Maher, Jr.

Bob Maher, Jr. holds his Pro Tour–Chicago trophy aloft

Extended really is fulfilling its intended role of being a somewhat stable format in which you can always play "your" deck. Maher has been playing an Oath of Druids deck, in various incarnations, for years. Each time the Extended environment changes, he just updates his deck and keeps playing it. When the Mercadian Masques set released, Maher zeroed in on Trade Routes and Ivory Mask as cards that would help his deck. In the quarterfinals he used Trade Routes to prevent Dirk Baberowski from destroying his Treetop Villages. Then in the finals he used Ivory Mask to prevent Brian Davis from targeting him with Drain Life or Corrupt. Since his deck contained four copies of Enlightened Tutor, Maher could access enchantments like these and, of course, Oath of Druids, at just the right time. Maher won the Pro Tour in part because his deck was extremely well tuned and he understood exactly why every card was in there.

This was the first major Extended tournament since the format was overhauled on October 1, 1999. At that time, four card sets rotated out and a number of "combo cards" were banned. The results of Pro Tour–Chicago show that not only was Bob Maher a winner, but so was the new Extended format. No deck was played by more than 12 percent of the 344-person field, while 13 different decks were played by at least 10 people. The 96 players who advanced to Day 2 of the Pro Tour were playing somewhere between 22 and 26 different kinds of decks (depending on what you count as the "same" deck). And the Top 8 had an unprecedented variety of decks (seven or eight distinct archetypes, depending on how you count). This variety should make the upcoming Qualifier season for Pro Tour–New York really exciting.

The other Top 8 decks were an interesting mix. Christian Lührs's deck secured his second Top 8 finish by using a Counter-Sliver deck to finish number one in the Swiss rounds. Hector Fuentes became the first-ever Spanish player to make the final day of a Pro Tour by playing a mono-blue Forbidian deck. (Jon Finkel piloted an almost identical deck to a Top 16 finish.) Dirk Baberowski was almost able to defend his Pro Tour–Chicago title with a blue-green Oath deck, but he lost to Maher in the quarterfinals. Alan Comer's "Suicide Brown," which used a lot of fast artifact mana to Tinker out threats like Phyrexian Processor and Phyrexian Colossus, was the talk of the tournament when he and his Mogg Squad teammates finally unveiled it early on Day 1. Tony Dobson's "Cocoa Pebbles" deck (an Enduring Renewal/Goblin Bombardment combo deck that splashes black for Dark Ritual, Necropotence, and Demonic Consultation), on the other hand, was the talk of the tournament on Day 2. All the good English players worked together for the first time ever and the result was England's best Pro Tour performance to date. Not only did Dobson make the Top 8, but John Ormerod finished ninth and three other members of the team made Day 2. Finally, Raphael Levy made his second Top 8 finish with a blue-green Squirrel Prison variant that didn't actually contain any Squirrels.

All in all, Pro Tour–Chicago was a great success. Friends and fans swarmed Bob Maher, Jr. after he defeated Brian Davis. Loud cheers and the arms of his fiancée surrounded him before he could make his way to the awards ceremony.

The next stop on the Pro Tour is Los Angeles, February 4–6, for a Mercadian Masques Booster Draft tournament. Then it's on to New York in April for a Masques Block Constructed event. The Qualifiers for New York will be Extended and they begin in January with Grand Prix–Seattle.

-Zvi Mowshowitz

Quarterfinals

Brian Davis (USA) defeated Tony Dobson (UK), 3-1. Davis's Necropotence deck defeated Dobson's Cocoa Pebbles deck through a combination of well-timed discards and unlucky Demonic Consultation plays by Dobson.

Dirk Baberowski (Germany) lost to Bob Maher, Jr. (USA), 3-0. Maher's version of the Oath deck proved faster and more consistent than Baberowski's, although the games were the longest of the Top 8.

Alan Comer (USA) lost to Raphael Levy (France), 3-0. Comer's Suicide Brown Tinker Deck fell victim to Levy's SCG deck, which seemed to have answers for everything.

Christian Luhrs (Germany) defeated Hector Fuentes Garcia (Spain), 3-1. Luhrs's early Slivers proved a problem for Fuentes's Forbidian deck, while Luhrs countered the late Powder Kegs that could have saved Fuentes.

Semifinals

Brian Davis (USA) swept Raphael Levy (France) out of the Semifainals in three straight games. In the first game, Davis allowed Levy's Winter Orb to stay on the table until it was a much bigger problem for LEvy tahn it was for Davis. In the second and third games, Davis got early Necropotences and destroyed Levy's mana-producing creatures, keeping Levy unable to compete.

In the semifinals, Bob Maher Jr (USA) defeated Christian Lührs (Germany) 3-1. Game one began as a counter war and ended with Luhrs's Swords to Plowhares on Maher's Spike Feeder. Maher fought on, however even Oath of Druiding, then Swords to Plowsharing his own creatures wasnt good enough. Game one went to Luhrs. Game two began badly for the German when he had to mulligan twice. To make things worse for Luhrs's mana problems, Maher had two wastelands on his side. When Maher's Morphling hit the table, Luhrs conceded game two. In games three and four, Luhr stayed with bad hands, and was never really in either game.

BOB MAHER, JR.

They call him the Great One. Ever since Bob Maher, Jr. started money drafting, it seemed to Nate Clarke and Feming Chan as if he could win almost at will. "If he wanted to win, he won," says Clarke, who is now semi-retired from the Magic Pro Tour. "I guess he wanted to win this time."

Hailing originally from the sight of his Pro Tour–Chicago victory, Maher, who now resides two hours away in Madison, Wisconsin, was more surprised than anyone was by his victory. "I thought I was a 'has been,'" said the golden-haired All-American boy, who makes his living distributing cards, mostly to Asia Pacific.

In what may have been the greatest match in Pro Tour history, Maher beat Brian Davis with his Enlightened Tutor/Oath deck to the surprise of many. Having played Counter Oath since Grand Prix–Kansas City, Maher knew the deck well. "Necro is a pretty bad matchup for Counter/Oath," said long-time playtest partner Derek Rank, "but give Bob credit. He kept his cool and won the match. I guess he's back."

In what was definitely the most incredible game of the tourney, Maher sat looking at his seven-card hand as Davis Wasted his lands and forced him to discard. When Maher, with no lands in play, did not play a land on turn three, it seemed all but over. What happened next was a Magic miracle. Facing incredible odds in the form of Davis's Necropotence, Maher was able to Force of Will his way back into the match. When he finally played a land, he was able to Disrupt Davis's Drain Life, and finally, with Davis at 1 life and no life gain left in his hand, the rookie was forced to concede.

After the match, in a scene almost as memorable at the match itself, Maher's fiancée rushed him and they embraced a la Rocky and Adrian. There wasn't a frown in the building. All over, players were heard saying, "Couldn't happen to a nicer guy," and Pro Tour regulars sought an audience with the Great One, who surprised one and all.

Now, Maher, who wasn't sure about his eligibility for Los Angeles can look forward to two months of practicing at his store. "I think the players there will be glad to draft with me for L.A.," said Maher. Was his Chicago performance an anomaly or a return to the ways of old? L.A. will be the first puzzle piece in the answer to that question.

–Gary Wise

The Finals table. Brian Davis is on the left; Bob Maher, Jr. and his stuffed monkey are on the right.

The Final Match

In what will go down as one of the great finals in Pro Tour history, hometown favorite Bob Maher, Jr. defeated first-time Pro Tour attendee Brian Davis in a 3–2 victory that stretched both players to their very limits.

Maher's start didn't look so good as Davis, who was playing a Necrodeck designed by online playtesting partner Craig Wescoe, came out strong with Unmask, followed by Dark Ritual for a Necropotence. Davis proceeded to force Maher to discard his entire hand, making him play off the top of his deck. Just when all seemed lost, however, Maher roared back by topdecking Ivory Mask. When Davis tried to rid himself of the problem by playing a Nevinyrral's Disk, Maher Enlightened Tutored for a Null Rod, and Davis scooped.

Game 2 was just as close. After Davis started the game off with a mulligan, he kept a six-card hand that again allowed him to play a first-turn Necropotence. Despite huge card advantage, Davis started running out of resources, and when he tried to Drain Life Maher for the final 4 damage, Maher, who'd sided out all of his creatures but Morphling, used Swords to Plowshares on a Treetop Village in response, gaining enough life to stay alive, and Davis conceded the game.

Game 3 seemed to cue Davis's comeback. In a game totally dominated by the Necrodeck's discard, Davis eventually built up the six mana he needed to Drain and Corrupt Maher. Game 4 was a fight over Maher's Ivory Mask. After he played it, Davis played two Disks and a Dystopia before finally getting rid of the pesky enchantment. He then rode his Drains to victory amid commentators Randy Buehler and Brian Hacker's songs of praise.

In the most exciting game of the tournament, Maher watched as Davis, who'd mulliganed to six cards, Unmasked Maher and followed that up with yet another first-turn Ritual Necro. Sitting without mana, Maher could only watch as Wasteland after Wasteland came out of Davis's deck. Giving Maher a little time to build up mana, Davis started to Drain Maher so as to gain life at seven lands, but Maher had built his hand so much that he was able to counter every Drain or Corrupt that Davis played. Finally, sitting at 1 life, Davis could only watch as Maher responded to his last Corrupt by discarding a Brainstorm to Force of Will. Davis threw down and conceded.

Maher, the hometown hero, emerged moments later in the players' gallery to a huge round of applause from observers and a passionate embrace from his fiancée. One of the warmest moments in Pro Tour history, it's one this reporter will never forget.

--Gary Wise

BRIAN DAVIS

Patience is a virtue. That is what can be learned from Brian Davis's example. "I think I've played in like 30 Qualifiers all told," says the 15-year-old private school attendee. "I made only like three Top 8s but I guess perseverance paid off." Time and again, Davis would make his way to Qualifiers in Tennessee, and time and again, he'd take his lumps, learn from his losses, and set his sights on the next tourney he'd attend.

Brian Davis didn't take his lumps this time around.

Playing in his first Pro Tour, Davis stormed out to a 7–0 first day before dropping his first three matches of Day 2. "I was overwhelmed. I was pretty sure better players were beating me. After round 10, I was just hoping to finish in the money." Davis finished off the Swiss rounds with four straight wins and a spot in the Top 8. Finish in the money indeed.

Making the Top 8, Davis proceeded to crush Pro Tour veterans Tony Dobson and Raphael Levy in the quarter and semifinals respectively. There was a lot of buzz comparing Davis to Randy Buehler, who time and again praised the rookie's play from his post in the announcers' booth.

Unfortunately, in the finals, it just wasn't to be. It was fairly obvious from the spectator's point of view that Davis was nervous, and it showed in his play. Some observers felt he should have won all five games. "I take nothing away from Bob," said Davis of his final opponent. "He played a great match and deserved to win."

What does a 15-year-old card player do with $15K? "I think I want to buy a car," said Davis, who is too young for a permit. "That way, when I hit 16, it'll be there waiting for me."

Now, with 24 player points under his belt, Davis can look forward to playing in his first Limited Pro Tour in Los Angeles. Having no local test group to work with, Davis will use the Internet to its fullest potential. "I think NetDraft will do me a lot of good." Davis worked with Internet personalities David Jafari and Craig Wescoe in developing his Necrodeck. "I owe them so much. I hope they'll help me with [Mercadian Masques] Booster Draft." He may not need their help after all.

–Gary Wise

Deck Analysis

The two decks with the most in common were the two Oath decks, played by Bob Maher, Jr. and Dirk Baberowski. Both used Oath of Druids to contain creature decks, and chose Morphling and Spike Feeder as two of their three creatures. Baberowski used Spike Weaver as his third creature because his deck was built with two colors, but Maher had a four-color mana base and could use Shard Phoenix instead. Both players used Gaea's Blessing to keep reshuffling their graveyards into their decks while using the Oath. Both also used Counterspell and Force of Will. Baberowski had the space to run more counters, with multiple Forbids, a Dissipate, and a Mana Leak, while Maher could afford only one Forbid. Both used Brainstorm and Impulse to search for key cards, and both used many lands to defeat opponents who refused to play creatures. This is where the decks diverged.

Each player chose to use a different second card in addition to Oath of Druids. Baberowski chose Thawing Glaciers, contributing to a more stable two-color mana base. Because Oath could be difficult to find, he included four copies of Powder Keg to survive until he did. Maher chose to run white as well, which meant he could not run enough basics to use Thawing Glaciers. Instead he made excellent use of Enlightened Tutor, allowing him to consistently find more Oath of Druids, and even put two of his four copies in the sideboard. In addition, *when he didn't want Oath he could get one of many enchantments or artifacts that work well against different* opponents. The most important was Aura of Silence, which let the deck Tutor for enchantment or artifact kill. While these cards are better against some decks than others, they are generally useful enough that you rarely get a handful of useless cards. If the game wasn't going anywhere, Abundance together with Sylvan would quickly win the game.

The sideboard is where Maher's strategy really paid off. Because of the Tutors, he could run single copies of cards like Circle of Protection: Red and Compost for specific opponents. The other two Oaths were there as well, and a Crater Hellion to clear the board against decks like Countersliver. In addition to this flexibility, his use of permanents to win control wars over the long term let him use Mana Short in these battles. Baberowski's sideboard had to contain more general cards like Annul, Propaganda, and Hydroblast, and include them in multiples, because the deck cannot Tutor. Noticeably absent from his version were cards to help in control and land wars, like Dust Bowl, Sylvan Library, and Trade Routes.

Christian Lührs was the top seed after the Swiss rounds, using a "DD-Sliver" (DD standing for Demonic Direction) deck. The 20 best slivers, Force of Will, and Counterspell made up the core of the deck. Swords to Plowshares and Disenchant removed key threats, and Misdirection gave him extra copies of Force of Will. All these cards could be fetched with Demonic Consultation, and since this deck had no other way to Tutor except Flood Plain, the losses were generally painless. The added flexibility of a one-cost instant Demonic Tutor let the deck fight counter wars, remove key threats, and drop the right Sliver when it needed to. The sideboard was designed to work with Demonic Consultation as well, giving Lührs extra copies of main-deck cards like Swords to Plowshares, Disenchant, and multiple copies of others. One very strange sideboard card was Honor the Fallen, but a reliable source said that the deck often got into races with Recur/Survival decks, where Honor the Fallen was crucial.

Alan Comer played a "Suicide Brown" deck, a Tinker-based deck with Grim Monolith, Mana Vault, Thran Dynamo, and Voltaic Key for artifact mana. Ancient Tomb and City of Traitors provided extra mana from its lands, so this deck could pay for expensive artifacts quickly and drop devastating threats before an opponent could counter them. It could also use that artifact mana to landlock vulnerable opponents under a Dust Bowl. The biggest of these was Phyrexian Processor, although the deck would often win with Masticore or a Phyrexian Colossus instead. Tinker could save mana but was more about getting the right artifact for the situation. Mana Leak and Arcane Denial countered other people's counters and protected Comer's threats from removal and Null Rod—by far this deck's greatest fear. These threats, especially Processor, were incredibly powerful in the long term, and Crumbling Sanctuary ensured Comer would reach that long term. Null Brooch helped out with combo decks, or protected Comer's board control. The sideboard contained Annul to try and stop Null Rod or other important artifacts and enchantments, Back to Basics to beat the many decks that refused to run basic lands, and Null Brooch against combo decks. This deck was very hard to sideboard that many cards out of, which is another reason (in addition to Tinker) why the sideboard had so many different cards.

Brian Davis played a Necropotence

Zvi Mowshowitz and Alan Comer try to determine if Comer can take an Intentinoal Draw to guarantee a spot in the Top 8

Top 8 Decks

1. CHRISTIAN LUHRS
Deck Name: "DD-Sliver (Demonic Direction)"
Deck Designer: Team NMA

CREATURES (20)
4 Acidic Sliver
4 Crystalline Sliver
4 Hibernation Sliver
4 Muscle Sliver
4 Winged Sliver

SPELLS (17)
4 Counterspell
3 Demonic Consultation
2 Disenchant
4 Force of Will
2 Misdirection
2 Swords to Plowshares

LAND (23)
4 City of Brass
4 Flood Plain
2 Gemstone Mine
2 Scrubland
1 Tropical Island
3 Tundra
4 Underground Sea
2 Undiscovered Paradise
1 Volcanic Island

SIDEBOARD
3 Perish
2 Swords to Plowshares
2 Disenchant
3 Hydroblast
2 Honorable Passage
3 Honor the Fallen

2. ALAN COMER
Deck Name: Suicide Brown
Deck Designer: Zvi & Mogg Squad

CREATURES (6)
4 Masticore
2 Phyrexian Colossus

SPELLS (35)
1 Arcane Denial
3 Crumbling Sanctuary
1 Cursed Scroll
2 Dust Bowl
4 Grim Monolith
3 Mana Leak
4 Mana Vault
1 Null Brooch
4 Phyrexian Processor
4 Thran Dynamo
4 Tinker
4 Voltaic Key

LAND (19)
3 Ancient Tomb
4 City of Traitors
12 Island

SIDEBOARD
3 Annul
2 Back to Basics
1 Caltrops
1 Crumbling Sanctuary
2 Disrupting Scepter
1 Mana Leak
1 Thran Foundry
3 Null Brooch
1 Phyrexian Furnace

3. BRIAN DAVIS
Deck Name: Necro
Deck Designer: Craig Wescoe

CREATURES (2)
2 Skittering Skirge

SPELLS (36)
4 Contagion
4 Corrupt
4 Duress
4 Dark Ritual
3 Demonic Consultation
4 Drain Life
4 Necropotence
2 Nevinyrral's Disk
3 Spinning Darkness
4 Unmask

LAND (22)
18 Swamp
4 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
2 Dystopia
2 Nevinyrral's Disk
2 Perish
3 Persecute
2 Planar Void
3 Powder Keg

4. DIRK BABEROWSKI

CREATURES (3)
1 Morphling
1 Spike Feeder
1 Spike Weaver

SPELLS (31)
4 Brainstorm
4 Counterspell
1 Dissipate
2 Forbid
4 Force of Will
3 Gaea's Blessing
4 Impulse
1 Mana Leak
4 Oath of Druids
4 Powder Keg

LAND (26)
3 Forest
8 Island
4 Thawing Glaciers
3 Treetop Village
4 Tropical Island
4 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
2 Hydroblast
1 Spike Feeder
2 Phyrexian Furnace
3 Annul
3 Propaganda
1 Emerald Charm
2 Disrupt
1 Compost

Deck Analysis

deck. Modern Necrodecks like his need Necropotence on the table in order to operate properly since they require more mana than they would otherwise require. The deck was designed to work well under Necropotence, with free spells like Unmask, Contagion, and Spinning Darkness, and life gaining from Drain Life and Corrupt. But if Davis's opening draw didn't include Necropotence or a Demonic Consultation, he normally had to mulligan to find one. The rest of the deck contained Duress to help Necro through and stop threats, Nevinyrral's Disk to kill noncreature threats, and Skittering Skirge to put the opponent on a clock. This deck needed Necropotence badly, and to get it the deck required four Demonic Consultations. The sideboard contained Dystopia to kill Ivory Mask and other troublesome cards, more Disks and three Powder Kegs for more removal, Planar Void for graveyard recursion, and Persecute in case the opponent was vulnerable.

Tony Dobson played a deck labeled by the Sideboard as "Cocoa Pebbles." The deck combined the infinite-damage combination of Enduring Renewal, Goblin Bombardment, and a zero-cost artifact creature with the card-drawing power of Necropotence. The key was to use Phyrexian Tower to both destroy Academy Rector, which allowed you to get either Necropotence or a piece of the combo, or to sacrifice a zero-cost creature to get the black mana for Necropotence. Demonic Consultation was riskier for this deck than most, because losing a piece of the combo lost Dobson the game. The rest of the deck contained Duress to clear the way for the combo, and Mox Diamond and Mana Vault for mana acceleration. The one Rector-ready utility enchantment is a lone Aura of Silence. The sideboard, unlike the main deck, had to be constructed in haste. Dobson grabbed Pyroblast for control, more Aura for various threats, and Peacekeeper for creatures, along with Abeyance and Mana Short to shut out opponents. One very tech card in the sideboard was a Defense of the Heart to get out Rectors.

The strangest deck in the Top 8 was

Reporters for the Dojo, the Sideboard, and Brainburst watch the finals for Internet coverage.

the one played by Raphael Levy. Its name is "Five Color Green," but while technically true this doesn't really explain what the deck is about. Most players who look at it think it's horrible. But if you take the time to examine it, it makes a lot of sense. The idea is to do almost nothing, but the right amount of almost nothing for the given situation. If Levy's opponent was aggressive, he would throw out Walls and Oppositions to keep his opponent tied down while he won with Survival. If his opponent played a control deck, Levy would use his counters to force through a Survival and win that way. Merfolk Looter served as a backup Survival in some ways. Winter Orb helped slow down the game so these strategies had time to work. Levy used Fire Whip to handle other decks with 1-toughness creatures, both those that swarm and those that tap those creatures for mana.

The one thing about this deck that I still don't understand is its low land count. Sixteen lands are simply not enough, especially in a Wasteland environment. This deck would often be slowed significantly while it got out its mana, even if it wasn't disrupted. Of course, by playing fast and loose with the land count, Levy got to have more threats if things worked out. To compensate, Levy didn't include all the four-or-more-cost utility creatures that are in most Survival decks, like Avalanche Riders and Deranged Hermit, even though Hermit would have worked amazingly with many cards in this deck. The sideboard gave him what he needed to play the game, with more counters, creature and enchantment removal, the fourth copy of some key cards, and three copies of Null Rod. Those Null Rods, while probably overkill for the field, gave him an excellent quarterfinal matchup against Comer.

Hector Fuentes Garcia played a Forbidian deck he coined "Blue L.D." This kind of deck was better before Thawing Glaciers was fixed, but it is still good. Force Spike kept the board under control with the help of Force of Will until Garcia could start using Counterspell and Forbid. He used Powder Keg for creature removal and Impulse and Brainstorm to search for what he needed. Ophidian gave Garcia the extra cards to win the game, or he could win with Morphling or Masticore, or by destroying all his opponent's lands with Dust Bowl, using lands from Thawing Glaciers. However, Garcia must have thought his deck was really good against most of the field or he seriously misjudged the metagame as the majority of his sideboard was targeted at one deck, "Sligh," in a field in which no deck was played by 15% or more of competitors.

—Zvi Mowshowitz

Top 8 Decks

5. BOB MAHER, JR.

CREATURES (3)
1 Shard Phoenix
1 Morphling
1 Spike Feeder

SPELLS (34)
1 Abundance
1 Aura of Silence
4 Brainstorm
4 Counterspell
1 Disrupt
4 Enlightened Tutor
1 Forbid
4 Force of Will
2 Gaea's Blessing
3 Impulse
1 Ivory Mask
1 Null Rod
2 Oath of Druids
1 Powder Keg
1 Sylvan Library
2 Swords to Plowshares
1 Trade Routes

LAND (23)
1 Faerie Conclave
3 Flood Plain
1 Reflecting Pool
1 Savannah
3 Treetop Village
4 Tropical Island
4 Tundra
2 Volcanic Island
4 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
1 Aura of Silence
1 Sacred Ground
1 Crater Hellion
1 Phyrexian Furnace
1 Powder Keg
1 Circle of Protection: Red
2 Oath of Druids
1 Swords to Plowshares
1 Gaea's Blessing
1 Compost
1 Light of Day
2 Mana Short
1 Peacekeeper

6. TONY DOBSON
Deck Name: Cocoa Pebbles
Deck Designed by John Ormerod, Warren Marsh, Ben Donaldson, Tony Dobson

CREATURES (10)
4 Academy Rector
2 Phyrexian Walker
4 Shield Sphere

SPELLS (28)
1 Aura of Silence
4 Dark Ritual
4 Demonic Consultation
4 Duress
3 Enduring Renewal
4 Goblin Bombardment
1 Mana Vault
3 Mox Diamond
4 Necropotence

LAND (22)
4 Badlands
4 City of Brass
4 Gemstone Mine
3 Peat Bog
3 Phyrexian Tower
4 Scrubland

SIDEBOARD
1 Abeyance
3 Aura of Silence
1 Defense of the Heart
2 PeaceKeeper
4 Pyroblast
2 Mana Short
2 Wasteland

7. RAPHAËL LEVY
Deck Name: SCG
Deck Designer: Phillippe Mogage

CREATURES (25)
4 Birds of Paradise
1 Ghitu Slinger
1 Gilded Drake
2 Llanowar Elves
2 Merfolk Looter
1 Monk Realist
1 Peacekeeper
1 Radiant's Dragoons
1 Silver Queen
2 Squee, Goblin Nabob
2 Quirion Ranger
2 Tradewind Riders
1 Uktabi Orangutan
4 Wall of Roots

SPELLS (19)
4 Arcane Denial
2 Fire Whip
2 Force of Will
3 Opposition
4 Survival of the Fittest
1 Vampiric Tutor
3 Winter Orb

LAND (16)
4 City of Brass
4 Savannah
2 Taiga
4 Tropical Island
2 Undiscovered Paradise

SIDEBOARD
1 Devout Witness
1 Disenchant
2 Force of Will
1 Hydroblast
1 Monk Realist
1 Scour
2 Swords to Plowshares
3 Null Rod
1 Opposition
1 Uktabi Orangutan
1 Winter Orb

8. HECTOR FUENTES GARCIA
Deck Name: Blue L.D.
Deck Designer: Hector Fuentes

CREATURES (7)
2 Masticore
1 Morphling
4 Ophidian

SPELLS (29)
4 Force Spike
4 Counterspell
4 Force of Will
3 Forbid
2 Treachery
4 Powder Keg
4 Impulse
4 Brainstorm

LAND (24)
14 Island
2 Dust Bowl
4 Thawing Glaciers
4 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
2 Annul
1 Disrupt
4 Hydroblast
2 Nevinyrral's Disk
1 Rainbow Efreet
4 Sea Sprite
1 Treachery

Hard Data

At Chicago, the field was startlingly diverse, with many different decks making appearances. As a result, players were unable to prepare their decks to face only one or two matchups. The most successful deck was "Trix," a Fruity Pebbles variant that included the Recurring Nightmare/Survival of the Fittest enging. Also successful was Cocoa Pebbles, which used Necropotence - this deck brough Tony Dobson into the Top 8, and took John Ormerod to a tenth-place finish. "Regular" Fruity Pebbles didn't do as well, with a poor showing overall. The number two deck was the Mogg Squad Suicide Brown deck, which finished significantly better than the other Tinker decks. In the chart below, the number of people playing the various popular decks is listed, along with the average record each deck achieved. Since some successful decks (notable Trix) didn't finish in the Top 8, their decklists are reproduced here.

Deck	# Played	Avg Wins	Avg Losses	Avg Draws
Trix	8	6	3	1
Suicide Brown	8	6	4	0
(All Tinker Variants)	15	5	3	0
Forbidian	24	5	4	0
Cocoa Pebbles	14	4	2	0
Tinker (non-SB)	7	4	3	0
Squirrel Prison	10	4	3	0
Countersliver	11	4	3	0
Necro	18	4	3	0
RecSur	27	4	3	0
(All Pebbles Variants)	30	4	3	0
Suicide Black	17	4	4	0
Stasis	6	4	5	0
Oath	37	3	3	0
Stompy	20	3	4	0
Sligh	34	3	4	0
Donate-Illusions	7	2	3	0
Replenish	7	2	3	0
WW	11	2	3	0
Fruity Pebbles	13	2	3	0

WHITE WEENIE

Ben Stark
Finish 8-6

CREATURES (20)
4 Mother of Runes
4 Soltari Monk
4 Soltari Priest
4 Warrior en-Kor
4 White Knight

SPELLS (22)
3 Armageddon
4 Disenchant
4 Empyrial Armor
3 Mox Diamond
4 Swords to Plowshares
4 Tithe

LAND (18)
4 Plateau
14 Plains

SIDEBOARD
2 Erase
2 Honor the Fallen
2 Karma
1 Pariah
2 Phyrexian Furnace
4 Pyroblast
2 Worship

HATRED

Worth Wollpert
Finish: 10-4

CREATURES (16)
4 Dauthi Horror
4 Dauthi Slayer
4 Phyrexian Negator
4 Carnophage

SPELLS (24)
4 Dark Ritual
4 Demonic Consultation
4 Duress
4 Hatred
4 Sarcomancy
4 Unmask

LAND (20)
4 City of Traitors
16 Swamp

SIDEBOARD
3 Contagion
3 Cursed Scroll
4 Masticore
2 Null Rod
3 Perish

STASIS

Sturla Bingen
Finish: 7-6-1

SPELLS (36)
2 Claws of Gix
3 Counterspell
4 Force of Will
4 Gush
4 Impulse
1 Misdirection
4 Propaganda
1 Rescue
4 Stasis
1 Stroke of Genius
4 Thwart
4 Turnabout

LAND (24)
24 Island

SIDEBOARD
2 Back to Basics
2 Annul
3 Chill
1 Counterspell
2 Cursed Totem
2 Mana Short
1 Morphling
2 Wall of Tears

SLIGH

Stephan Valkyser
Finish: 10-4

CREATURES (22)
4 Ball Lightning
4 Fireslinger
2 Goblin Cadets
4 Goblin Patrol
4 Jackal Pup
4 Mogg Fanatic

SPELLS (19)
4 Fireblast
4 Incinerate
4 Land Grant
3 Reckless Abandon
4 Shock

LAND (19)
11 Mountain
4 Taiga
4 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
1 Boil
3 Bottle Gnomes
3 Cursed Scroll
4 Emerald Charm
4 Pyroblast

More Successful Extended Decks

TINKER (IRON GIANT)

Lan D. Ho
Finish: 10-4

CREATURES (7)
1 Karn, Silver Golem
3 Masticore
2 Phyrexian Colossus
1 Phyrexian Processor

SPELLS (30)
1 Crumbling Sanctuary
3 Cursed Scroll
4 Grim Monolith
4 Impulse
4 Mana Vault
2 Mishra's Helix
1 Stroke of Genius
3 Thran Dynamo
4 Tinker
4 Voltaic Key

LAND (23)
3 Dust Bowl
12 Island
4 Rishadan Port
4 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
4 Annul
2 Hydroblast
2 Hurkyl's Recall
1 Mishra's Helix
2 Phyrexian Furnace
2 Capsize
2 Crumbling Sanctuary

STOMPY

Don Gallitz
Finish: 9-4-1

CREATURES (27)
4 Albino Troll
4 Elvish Lyrist
4 Llanowar Elves
3 Lumbering Satyr
4 Pouncing Jaguar
4 River Boa
4 Wild Dogs

SPELLS (11)
4 Giant Growth
4 Rancor
3 Winter Orb

LAND (22)
14 Forest
4 Gaea's Cradle
4 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
2 Acridian
3 Emerald Charm
4 Hunted Wumpus
3 Hurricane
2 Phyrexian Furnace
1 Winter Orb

TRIX

Mark White
Finish 10-4

CREATURES (16)
4 Academy Rector
1 Avalanche Riders
1 Deranged Hermit
1 Krovikian Horror
1 Monk Idealist
1 Monk Realist
1 Nekrataal
1 Shield Sphere
1 Spike Feeder
1 Spike Weaver
1 Thrull Surgeon
1 Uktabi Orangutan
1 Verdant Force

SPELLS (21)
4 Birds of Paradise
1 Contamination
1 Enduring Renewal
1 Goblin Bombardment
1 Oath of Ghouls
4 Recurring Nightmare
4 Survival of the Fittest
4 Wall of Roots
1 Worship

LAND (23)
4 Bayou
4 City of Brass
2 Grasslands
2 Phyrexian Tower
4 Savannah
4 Taiga
3 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
1 Arcane Laboratory
1 Aura of Silence
1 City of Solitude
1 Devout Witness
3 Ebony Charm
1 Emerald of Charm
1 Karma
1 Light of Day
4 Pyroblast
1 Spike Feeder

REPLENISH

Jay Elarar
Finish: 8-5-1

SPELLS (38)
2 Arcane Denial
4 Attunement
1 Aura of Silence
1 Defense Grid
1 Energy Field
2 Enlightened Tutor
4 Force of Will
4 Frantic Search
4 Intuition
3 Lilting Refrain
4 Opalescence
4 Pandemonium
4 Replenish

LAND (23)
4 Ancient Tomb
12 Island
7 Plains

SIDEBOARD
1 Arcane Laboratory
1 Aura of Silence
1 Chill
2 Disenchant
2 Disrupt
1 Enlightened Tutor
1 Karma
1 Phyrexian Furnace
1 Sacred Ground
3 Wasteland
1 Sactimony

SQUIRREL PRISON

Kurt Burgner
Finish: 9-4-1

CREATURES (24)
4 Birds of Paradise
4 Deranged Hermit
1 Llanowar Elves
4 Ophidian
1 Pygmy Hippo
1 Uktabi Orangutan
4 Tradewind Riders
1 Wall of Blossoms
4 Wall of Roots

SPELLS (14)
3 Force of Will
4 Impulse
4 Opposition
3 Winter Orb

LAND (22)
9 Forest
9 Island
4 Tropical Island

SIDEBOARD
3 Chill
1 Constant Mists
3 Emerald Charm
1 Force of Will
1 Null Rod
2 Phyrexian Furnace
1 Quash
2 Uktabi Orangutan
1 Zur's Weirding

RECSUR

Masaya Mori
Finish: 10-4

CREATURES (29)
2 Academy Rector
4 Birds of Paradise
2 Granger Guildmage
1 Krovikian Horror
1 Nekrataal
1 Phyrexian Plaguelord
1 Masticore
1 Monk Realist
4 Quirion Ranger
1 Sliver Queen
1 Spike Feeder
1 Spike Weaver
2 Tradewind Riders
1 Squee, Goblin Nabob
1 Uktabi Orangutan
4 Wall of Roots
1 Wood Elves

SPELLS (13)
3 Duress
4 Recurring Nightmare
4 Survival of the Fittest
1 Vampiric Tutor
1 Worship

LAND (18)
4 Bayou
3 Forest
4 Savannah
4 Taiga
2 Tropical Island
1 Volrath's Stronghold

SIDEBOARD
2 Disenchant
4 Ebony Charm
1 Gloom
1 Lobotomy
4 Pyroblast
1 Spike Feeder
1 Spike Weaver
1 Uktabi Orangutan

FRUITY PEBBLES

Kai Budde
Finish: 8-5-1

CREATURES (5)
4 Shield Sphere
1 Phyrexian Walker

SPELLS (36)
4 Tithe
3 Mana Vault
4 Enduring Renewal
4 Goblin Bombardment
4 Brainstorm
4 Demonic Consultation
4 Impulse
3 Arcane Denial
4 Force of Will
2 Enlightened Tutor

LAND (19)
4 Plateau
4 Scrubland
4 Tundra
2 Adarkar Wastes
2 Volcanic Island
2 Flood Plain
1 Underground Sea

SIDEBOARD
2 Disenchant
1 Light of Day
2 Mana Short
1 Null Rod
2 Peacekeeper
3 Pyroclasm
4 Pyroblast

SECRET FORCE

Alex McConnell
Finish: 8-5-1

CREATURES (30)
3 Elvish Lyrist
3 Fyndhorn Elves
4 Llanowar Elves
4 River Boa
4 Spike Feeder
2 Spike Weaver
3 Uktabi Orangutan
3 Verdant Force
4 Wall of Roots

SPELLS (8)
4 Natural Order
4 Creeping Mold

LAND (22)
16 Forest
3 Gaea's Cradle
3 Wasteland

SIDEBOARD
3 Null Rod
3 Life Force
3 Choke
3 Emerald Charm
3 Phyrexian Furnace